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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to use data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress to describe changes in performance within the subject area of social studies and citizenship education. The items from the citizenship and social studies national assessments illustrate that trends over time are not uniform within these subject areas. The first assessment of citizenship was conducted during 1969-1970 and the first assessment of social studies was conducted during 1971-1972. Both subject areas were reassessed in 1975-1976. The population sampled were 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds. There are two main sections to the paper: the first describes and analyzes changes in political knowledge and attitudes, while the second describes and analyzes changes in social studies skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Trends indicated declining performance in the area of political knowledge and attitudes. Achievement levels dropped in all the content areas assessed, particularly in knowledge of government and political process. Students' valuing of constitutional rights and respect for others did not decline substantially. Changes in overall social studies achievement appeared related to age level: 9-year-olds showed no significant change; 13-year-olds achievement declined slightly; and 17-year-olds performance dropped substantially. (Author/JK)

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CITIZENSHIP/SOCIAL STUDIES ACHIEVEMENT

TRENDS OVER TIME

By:
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National Assessment of Educational Progress
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CITIZENSHIP/SOCIAL STUDIES ACHIEVEMENT -- TRENDS OVER TIME

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to use data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to demonstrate some types of exploration that can be done to describe changes in performance within a learning area. The items from the Citizenship and Social Studies assessments will be classified into a variety of subtopics to illustrate that trends over time are not uniform within subject areas.

There are two main sections to the paper. The first describes changes over time in items judged to assess political knowledge and attitudes. Performance in this area is discussed for several subtopics, for instance, understanding the structure and function of government, understanding the political process, and recognizing and valuing constitutional rights. The second major section describes changes in performance for social studies skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

The reader should keep in mind that the paper is meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Although two possible classifications are presented, there are certainly other ways to categorize the data. Also, this paper is confined to results for national samples. If time permitted exploration of group performance in equal detail, many more observations could be made.

The first assessment of citizenship was conducted during 1969-1970 and the first assessment of social studies was conducted during 1971-1972. Both subject areas were reassessed in the 1975-1976 school year to determine changes in performances. The populations sampled in both assessments were 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds and 17-year-olds. The following table displays the dates for these assessments.

	First Citizenship Assessment	First Social Studies Assessment	Second Citizenship and Social Studies Assessment
Age 9	Winter, 1970	Winter, 1972	Winter, 1976
Age 13	Fall, 1969	Fall, 1971	Fall, 1975
Age 17	Spring, 1969	Spring, 1972	Spring, 1976

Seven years separate the first and second administration of citizenship items for 17-year-olds, while six years separate the assessments for 9- and 13-year-olds. Four years separate the first and second assessments of social studies items for all age groups.

Even though data were collected for both in-school and out-of-school 17-year-olds, for the sake of comparability to other age levels, only in-school data are discussed in this paper.

When the exercises have passed extensive reviews by subject matter specialists, measurement experts and lay persons, they are administered to probability samples. Not all students take all exercises. The exercises are grouped into booklets and each booklet is administered to a representative sample of about 2,500 9-, 13- or 17-year-olds. The approximate numbers of respondents who participated in the citizenship and social studies assessments are listed below.

	First Citizenship Assessment	First Social Studies Assessment	Second Citizenship and Social Studies Assessment
Age 9	4,400	17,800	9,700
Age 13	24,500	23,300	22,300
Age 17	25,900	27,700	22,200

To measure changes in performance, testing conditions must be as nearly replicated as possible. Items used to measure change are identical in wording and format in each assessment. National Assessment further attempts to keep administration procedures constant by tape-recording instructions and items and by using trained administrators, rather than classroom personnel, to conduct assessments. Scoring is held constant since multiple choice items are optically scanned and most open-ended items are rescored. For example, all the open-ended responses from the 1969-1970 assessment were rescored together with the 1975-1976 responses. If responses are not rescored, reliability studies are conducted to check scoring consistency.

Analyzing the Data

Respondents are weighted in accordance with the sample design and an estimate of the proportion of each population that would have answered a question acceptably is computed. For example, the estimated percentage of 13-year-olds who answered a given item acceptably is defined as the weighted number of acceptable responses divided by the total weight of all 13-year-olds in the sample. Standard error estimates of percentages are obtained by applying the jackknife technique. Once percentages of response patterns and their standard errors have been computed for both assessment years, the changes in the percentages are calculated by simple subtraction. Since percentages were estimated from independent samples, the standard error of the change percentage can be calculated by pooling the standard errors of the percentages

Much of the data in the following sections is based on mean performance and differences in mean performance. In these cases, performance

over the same group of items has been averaged for each assessment year and the differences between the averages computed. Again the jackknife technique is applied to obtain standard errors for the means and the standard errors of the two means are pooled to obtain the standard error of the change in means.

National Assessment has adopted the convention that if an obtained difference between proportions is twice as large as the pooled standard error of the percentages from the two assessment years, then the difference is statistically significant. Statements about changes in performance are only made when the differences are statistically significant. On all tables, significant differences are indicated by an asterisk (*). All percentages and differences are computed to greater accuracy than they are reported. Since the results in the following sections have been rounded to one decimal place, the figures presented in tables may not total due to rounding error.

Political Knowledge and Attitudes

Exercises measuring political knowledge and attitudes are taken from both the citizenship and social studies assessments. Citizenship items were first administered in 1969-1970 and social studies items were first administered in 1971-1972; both sets of items were readministered in 1975-1976 to determine changes in performance.

When all the items judged to measure political knowledge and attitudes were summarized, overall declines were found for all three age groups (Table 1).

Table 1. Average Performance Levels
Political Knowledge and Attitudes

	1969-70	1975-76	Change+	1971-72	1975-76	Change
Age 9 (18)	59.7%	51.0%	-8.7*	(14) 67.6%	66.2%	-1.4*
Age 13 (38)	64.5%	62.0%	-2.5*	(30) 56.2%	54.2%	-2.0*
Age 17 (43)	71.1%	64.4%	-6.7*	(34) 71.3%	67.6%	-3.6*

*Indicates that the means for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

+Represents a six-year change at ages 9 and 13 and a seven-year change at age 17 in terms of school years.

( )Indicates number of items.

Figures for 17-year-olds, 1972-1976, do not total due to rounding error.

Since there were relatively few items for 9-year-olds, no further reliable generalizations about 9-year-old performance can be made beyond the observation that both sets declined. However, 13- and 17-year-old performance can be investigated in more detail. Political knowledge and political attitudes declined about equally for 13-year-olds. However, for 17-year-

olds the decline in political knowledge was approximately twice the drop in political attitudes (Table 2).

Table 2. Average Performance Levels
Political Knowledge and Attitudes

	1969	1975-76	Change+	1971-72	1975-76	Change
Age 13						
Knowledge (28)	65%	62%	-3*	(20) 50%	48%	-2
Attitudes (14)	65%	61%	-4*	(12) 66%	64%	-2
Age 17						
Knowledge (30)	73%	65%	-8*	(21) 64%	59%	-5*
Attitudes (18)	67%	63%	-4*	(14) 80%	78%	-2*

*Indicates that the means for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

+Represents a six-year change at age 13 and a seven-year change at age 17 in terms of school years.

( )Indicates number of items. (Exercises judged to measure aspects of both attitudes and knowledge were summarized as both.)

Changes in performance on political knowledge and attitudes items were also investigated in terms of five major content areas: 1) constitutional rights, 2) respect for others, 3) structure and function of government, 4) poltiical process, and 5) international affairs.

Although there were significant declines at both ages in all five content areas, the declines appeared somewhat less sharp in the areas of constitutional rights and respect for others (Table 3).

In the content areas of constitutional rights and respect for others, overall declines were generally about two percentage points for both ages. In the areas of government and political processes, which will be discussed later, the declines were generally over four percentage points, with somewhat less change between 1971 and 1975 for the 13-year-olds, but even larger declines between 1969 and 1976 for 17-year-olds.

Table 3. Average Performance Levels
Constitutional Rights and Respect for Others

	Constitutional Rights					
	1969	1975-76	Change+	1971-72	1975-76	Change
Age 13 (9)	67.6%	67.1%	-.5	(8) 66.4%	64.4%	-2.0*
Age 17	Insufficient number of exercises			(11) 78.9%	76.9%	-2.0*

	Respect for Others					
	1969	1975-76	Change+	1971-72	1975-76	Change
Age 13 (8)	67.3%	64.7%	-2.6*	Insufficient number of exercises		
Age 17 (8)	82.1%	79.8%	-2.3*	(9) 77.9%	76.0%	-1.9*

*Indicates that the means for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

+Represents a six-year change at age 13 and a seven-year change at age 17 in terms of school years.

( )Indicates number of items.

The pattern across political knowledge and political attitudes is reflected within the constitutional rights classification. These items asked both whether students recognized constitutional rights and whether they valued them. At age 13 the patterns for decline were similar for recognizing or valuing constitutional rights; at age 17 the declines appeared more uniform for items concerning recognizing than they were for items concerning valuing.

For 13-year-olds on both recognizing and valuing items, the number of exercises registering improvements almost equalled the number of exercises registering declines; however, the declines were somewhat larger. For example, in valuing constitutional rights 13-year-olds' performance improved 4.8 and 3.9 percentage points on two exercises about freedom of

of the press, but their performance declined 5.1 percent and 16.6 percent on two items related to freedom of assembly and 10.1 percent on an item about freedom of religion.

Seventeen-year-olds were only asked six knowledge questions about constitutional rights, but their performance declined on four of them. They were asked ten questions about valuing constitutional rights, with performance improving on one item and declining on three. It is interesting to note that two of the declining exercises related to freedom of speech -- the same area in which 13-year-olds improved. One of these exercises presented below in Table 4, represented the largest gain on the values items for 13-year-olds and the largest drop for 17-year-olds.

Table 4. Percentages of Response to Item "Should a Newspaper Publish Criticism of the Government?" -- Ages 13 and 17

Should a newspaper or magazine be allowed to publish something that criticizes an elected government official?

	13-Year-Olds		17-Year-Olds	
	1971	1975	1972	1976
Yes	49%	54%*	75%	67%*
No	38	27*	14	15
Undecided	12	19*	10	17*

*Indicates that the percentages for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

Figures may not total 100 percent due to rounding error.

Although both ages exhibited overall decline in the area of respect for others, results for several exercises in this content area were encouraging -- particularly at age 17. Seventeen-year-olds improved seven and eight percentage points on two series of questions which asked about

willingness to have persons of other races participate in activities typically encountered in daily life -- for example, live in their neighborhood, vote in elections or attend their church. They also demonstrated increased understanding of some of the problems faced by people living in poor neighborhoods. Approximately ninety percent in 1972 and ninety-three percent in 1976 could give a reason why people living in inadequate housing do not simply move to better neighborhoods.

There were substantial overall declines in the content areas of structure and function of government and political process for both 13- and 17-year-old (Table 5).

Table 5. Average Performance Levels
Structure and Function of Government and Political Process

	Structure and Function of Government					
	1969	1975-76	Change+	1971-72	1975-76	Change
Age 13 (11)	63.7%	58.3%	-5.4*	(11) 43.5%	43.6%	.1
Age 17 (15)	64.4%	53.9%	-10.5*	(12) 61.8%	56.5%	-5.3*
	Political Process					
	1969	1975-76	Change+	1971-72	1975-76	Change
Age 13 (10)	63.2%	59.0%	-4.2*	(6) 57.0%	54.1%	-2.9*
Age 17 (13)	65.5%	59.0%	-6.5*	(6) 74.4%	70.0%	-4.4*

*Indicates that the means for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

+Represents a six-year change at age 13 and a seven-year change at age 17 in terms of school years.

( )Indicates number of items.

The ability to explain the basic concept of democracy dropped over ten percentage points for both ages. Thirteen-year-olds' performance dropped from fifty-three percent to forty-two percent, and 17-year-olds

declined from eighty-six percent to seventy-four percent. Students were not required to give complex answers. Such responses as "run by the people," "where the majority rules" and "it's freedom of what you say and do" were scored as acceptable. Some of the unacceptable responses were quite inventive, as the following 13-year-old examples demonstrate: "It's where people get ripped off, I think by Congress," "It go (sic) up in the air and it came back down. It's a big ballcon," "A government of discovery," and finally the apologetic "I am sorry but I do not mengal (sic) with politicul (sic) matters."

Even though nearly all respondents could name the President, knowledge about the U.S. Congress underwent a sizeable decline. In the 1976 assessment, sixty-five percent of the 13-year-olds and eighty-eight percent of the 17-year-olds identified the Senate as one of the two parts of Congress, a decline of six to seven percentage points from their performance in the first assessment. About one-third to one-half of the 17-year-olds in 1976 knew functions of the Senate, such as approving treaties and ratifying appointments. Results on these items declined over ten percentage points from the first assessment. Ability to name congressional representatives declined nine percentage points, from fifty-seven percent to forty-eight percent at age 17. Only about one-fifth of the 13-year-olds in either year could name one of their representatives from the house or the senate. There was also approximately a ten percentage point decline at both ages in the knowledge that senators are elected. In 1976, sixty-four percent of the 13-year-olds and eighty-one percent of the 17-year-olds knew a senator is elected to office.

Although some items did show improved performance, the only consistency

exhibited occurred with items related to the U.S. Department of State -- probably a result of the visibility of Henry Kissinger.

On the item below, the influence of the press was anticipated, but not realized.

Table 6. Percentages of Response to Item "Powers of the President," -- Ages 9, 13 and 17

A. Does the President have the right to do anything affecting the United States that he wants to do?

	9-Year-Olds		13-Year-Olds		17-Year-Olds	
	1970	1976	1969	1975	1969	1976
Yes	46%	51%*	23%	23%	20%	10%*
No	49	42*	72	74	79	87*
I don't know.	4	7*	5	3*	1	3*

B. (If Yes to A) Why?

C. (If No to A) Why not?

Percentage Giving Either Yes or No to Part A and an Acceptable Reason in Parts B or C

9-Year-Olds		13-Year-Olds		17-Year-Olds	
1970	1976	1969	1975	1969	1976
33	21*	60	59	71	74

*Indicates that the percentages for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

Figures may not total 100 percent due to rounding error.

Even though 17-year-olds were more likely to recognize the President cannot do anything he wants, their ability to give reasons why did not change significantly. Thirteen-year-old performance stayed about the same, and at age 9 performance declined.

One subset of the political process content area was political participation. Less than half the 13-year-olds in either 1969 or 1975 felt they could influence decisions of local government. The percentage of 17-year-olds feeling they could have such influence dropped considerably from seventy-three percent to fifty-six percent. On a similar question concerning the national level, results were quite different. The percentage of 17-year-olds feeling they could have an influence at the national level increased from thirty-nine percent to fifty-two percent. It is interesting to note that in 1969 close to three-fourths of the 17-year-olds felt that they could influence their local government, while only two-fifths thought they could influence their national government. By 1976, percentages on these questions became more similar, with slightly over half feeling they could influence either level of government.

Despite the institution of the 18-year-old vote, actual participation in political activities declined at age 17. Fewer 17-year-olds had signed petitions or written letters to government officials; the percentage having participated in a public election campaign declined from eighteen percent in 1969 to nine percent in 1976.

In the content area of international affairs, respondents at both age 13 and 17 improved in their ability to state peaceful methods to avoid future wars. However, decreased performance on items relating to the United Nations and items concerning general interest in other countries led to an overall decline in this area.

In summary, the trends overall indicate declining performance in the area of political knowledge and attitudes. Achievement levels have dropped in all the major content areas assessed, particularly in the areas of

knowledge of government and understanding the political process. However, students' valuing of constitutional rights and respect for others did not decline substantially. It is encouraging to note that more young people than before appear to respect the rights of people of other races, to understand the need for laws, to recognize some problems faced by poor people, and to understand ways to avoid future wars.

Social Studies

Changes in overall social studies achievement between 1971-1972 and 1975-1976 appeared related to age level:

1) nine-year-olds showed no significant change in performance;

2) thirteen-year-olds' achievement tended to decline slightly; and

3) seventeen-year-olds' performance dropped by approximately three percentage points.

The overall patterns do change somewhat when the items included in the social studies assessments are categorized in three major areas: 1) knowledge, 2) skills and 3) attitudes. Four topics are discussed under knowledge -- economics, geography, history and politics. Skills items deal with ability to obtain and to interpret information; questions about attitudes cover support for constitutional rights and respect for others.

In the knowledge area there were no significant changes for 9- and 13-year-olds, whereas 17-year-olds declined approximately four percentage points (Table 7).

Table 7. Average Performance Levels
Social Studies Knowledge

	1971-1972	1975-1976	Change
Age 9 (29)	63.9%	65.5%	1.6
Age 13 (54)	56.8%	55.8%	-1.1
Age 17 (59)	66.4%	62.5%	-3.9*

*Indicates that the means for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

( )Indicates number of items.

Figures at age 13 do not total due to rounding error.

Economics was the only one of the four knowledge areas on which 13-year-olds showed a significant improvement between assessments; 17-year-olds who declined in all four areas registered their smallest decrease here. (Nine-year-olds were given very few items in this area.) The results for the two ages were inconsistent in that 13-year-olds tended to improve on items concerning industrialization and the comparative economics of the U.S. and U.S.S.R., while 17-year-olds tended to decline on these items. For example, when asked if both the United States and Russia were rich in natural resources, the 13-year-olds showed an improvement of eleven percentage points, while the 17-year-olds' performance dropped five percentage points. Only about one-third of the 13-year-olds and half of the 17-year-olds realized that over-production of food has been a problem for the Untied States, but not for Russia. While results on this item for 13-year-olds remained the same between assessments, those for 17-year-olds declined six percentage points.

When asked to explain the growing importance of energy resources to the United States, thirty-eight percent of the 13-year-olds gave an acceptable explanation -- an improvement of ten percentage points. Even though approximately sixty-two percent of the 17-year-olds were able to give an acceptable explanation, they showed no significant change in achievement.

Both 13- and 17-year-olds declined in the area of geography, mostly in their ability to read maps. For example, six percent fewer 13-year-olds and eight percent fewer 17-year-olds were able to identify the Sahara Desert on a map as a place having little rainfall. The majority of both age groups remained unsure of the concepts of latitude and longitude. Nine-year-olds showed no significant difference in performance on their geography

items, which concentrated heavily on place names. For example, in 1976 eight percent more (sixty-six percent) recognized that the Amazon River is not in the United States; about the same percentage as in the first assessment (forty-two percent) recognized that Mississippi is a state in the south; and fewer (thirty-four percent) were able to correctly select a state in the far west.

Average performance on the history items was about sixty-five percent for all three age groups. However, 9- and 13-year-old performance remained about the same, while 17-year-old performance declined four percentage points. The 17-year-olds did not register improvement on any of the history items; their performance ramained about the same on thirteen items and declined on fifteen items. Declines crossed a variety of content; for example, in 1976 seven percent fewer (fifty-nine percent) knew why the colonies had rebelled from Great Britain, eight percent fewer (seventy-eight percent) knew who was President during the civil war, and nine percent fewer (thirty-four percent) knew the purpose of the Selma march.

In the fourth and last area of social studies knowledge assessed, political knowledge, 13-year-olds did not show a significant change in performance while 17-year-olds declined by approximately five percentage points. (There were very few 9-year-old items in this area.) Since the majority of the items summarized in this area were already discussed in terms of the structure and function of government and political process content classifications presented earlier for political knowledge and attitudes, they will not be described again.

Between 1971-1972 and 1975-1976, average results for items assessing social studies skills showed no significant change for 9-year-olds, but significant declines for 13- and 17-year-olds (Table 8).

Table 8. Average Performance Levels
Social Studies Skills

	1971-1972	1975-1976	Change
Age 9 (28)	63.9%	65.2%	1.3
Age 13 (38)	63.4%	61.4%	-2.0*
Age 17 (32)	76.1%	73.6%	-2.4*

*Indicates that the means for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

( )Indicates number of items.

Figures at age 17 do not total due to rounding error.

The skills exercises were classified into two subtopics -- obtaining information and interpreting information. Skill in obtaining information includes not only a knowledge of where and how to seek information, but also the ability to raise questions. Interpreting information concerns the use of thinking skills and problem-solving techniques to understand information.

As the overall patterns of change in skills items might indicate, the changes in performance for these two subtopics were quite different for 9-year-olds than they were for 13- and 17-year-olds (Table 9).

Nine-year-olds showed no change in achievement for obtaining information skills, but improved in their ability to interpret information. About two-thirds of the 9-year-olds in both assessments were able to identify the appropriate sources for particular information. However, when asked to interpret a poem accompanied by a picture of four interlocked hands -- one red, one yellow, one black and one white -- 9-year-olds showed an improvement of fourteen percentage points from forty-eight percent to sixty-two percent. Nine-year-olds also improved on questions concerning simple logic.

Table 9. Average Performance Levels
Obtaining and Interpreting Information Skills

	Obtaining Information		
	1971-1972	1975-1976	Change
Age 9 (17)	64.1%	64.8%	.7
Age 13 (13)	57.1%	53.9%	-3.2*
Age 17 (7)	65.0%	60.7%	-4.2*

	Interpreting Information		
	1971-1972	1975-1976	Change
Age 9 (11)	63.6%	65.9%	2.3*
Age 13 (25)	66.6%	65.3%	-1.4*
Age 17 (25)	79.2%	77.2%	-2.0*

*Indicates that the means for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

( )Indicates number of items.

Figures at age 17 (Obtaining) and age 13 (Interpreting) do not total due to rounding error.

In contrast to age 9 performance, 13- and 17-year-old performance declined for both subtopics, particularly obtaining information. Since there were so few 17-year-old items, further generalizations about their performance is difficult. Thirteen-year-old declines were mainly registered on items concerning obtaining information from maps and asking relevant questions.

Twenty-four of the twenty-five items requiring interpretation of information were identical for ages 13 and 17. The stimulus materials involved pictures, maps, graphs and several kinds of prose. Both age groups improved on few questions, two of which concerned whether or not it could be proved that people from Mexico are nicer than people from Canada or that one religion is better than another. Although performance declined on seven

items at each age, five of which were the same, there was no easily discernible pattern in terms of the type of item that declined as opposed to the type of item that stayed the same. Of the five declining items given at both ages, one related to a graph, one to a map, two to logical reasoning, and one to distinguishing fact from opinion. In every case, performance on similar exercises did not decline, but stayed the same.

Results in the area of attitudes showed a significant decline for all three age levels (Table 10).

Table 10. Average Performance Levels
Social Studies Attitudes

	1971-1972	1975-1976	Change
Age 9 (9)	80.9%	79.1%	-1.8*
Age 13 (11)	69.7%	67.8%	-1.9*
Age 17 (14)	79.3%	77.6%	-1.8*

*Indicates that the means for the two assessments differed by at least two standard errors of the difference.

( )Indicates number of items.

Figures at age 17 do not total due to rounding error.

All of 9-year-old items concerned belief in the worth of the individual. Mostly, they, themselves, were the individual in question; for example, a number of the items asked if they would be willing to decide things in school. There were no significant changes in performance on these items. Although 9-year-olds did not improve significantly on any of the attitude items, they did decline on two. One of these, an open-ended item, asked if they would be late to school to help a hurt friend, the other asked about their interest in what is happening in our country and other countries.

At age 13 and 17, the attitudinal items fell into two categories: belief in the worth of the individual, and attitudes toward constitutional rights. Since these two classifications are very close to the respect for others and value constitutional rights content areas discussed in the political knowledge and attitudes section, they will not be discussed beyond repeating that 13-year-old performance on items concerning belief in the worth of the individual was high, but tended to decline. Thirteen-year-olds did not decline on items assessing attitudes toward constitutional rights, while 17-year-olds did.

In conclusion, the overall declines in social studies achievement at age 17 are disquieting. However, patterns for changes in social studies performance must be discussed in terms of specific ages and content areas. Even though 13-year-old performance declined in both skill areas, it did not decline in valuing constitutional rights or in the overall knowledge area. Nine-year-olds, who showed no significant change in overall performance, improved in their ability to interpret information.